

SAINT MARY OF THE LAKE SEMINARY
MUNDELEIN, ILLINOIS 60060

Reverend Thomas J. Murphy
Rector
October 15, 1973

This is the first of the Monday Formation Conferences.....and, as rector, it's my privilege to share with you a View from the Bridge as this presentation is often called.

Before I enunciate the view which is mine, it might help to tell you a little about myself, my experiences, and also to share with you the reasons why I agreed to assume the position of rector of St. Mary of the Lake Seminary.

I am 41 years old, born and raised on the West Side - St. Mel Parish and later St. Catherine of Siena. Both my parents were from Ireland and I have an older brother, Bart, who is a vice president for an insurance company. My brother and his wife, Peg, have five children and live in St. John Brebeuf Parish in Niles. I have a younger sister, Eileen and she and my brother-in-law, Dennis, have four children and live in St. Julian Eymard Parish in Elk Grove.

My own seminary education was the usual Quigley-Mundelein experience. Ordained in 1958, my first assignment was to post graduate studies here at Mundelein where I received an S.T.D. in 1960. For five years I was an associate at Santa Maria del Popolo Parish. My prime interest at that time was coordinating the parish school, the CCD program for grade school and high school and the religious education program for adults. Perhaps my major portion of time was spent with young people from whom I learned a great deal. With the advent of the new liturgy I was the Lake County coordinator for the Liturgical Commission and Training Program. While at Santa Maria, I commuted to Loyola once a week for the counseling program with Fathers Curran and Kennedy.

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In 1965, I was assigned to St. Francis of Rome Parish in Cicero. It was difficult to leave Santa Maria del Popolo, but the new assignment was a real challenge. I became involved once again with the school, religious education, and the teen-agers. In addition, I began working on the formation of a Community Organization in Cicero with the help of Monsignor John Egan and Mr. Tom Gaudette.

While at St. Francis, I began to be involved with some of the downtown diocesan agencies. I became involved with the Cana Conference and began giving Pre-Cana and Cana Conferences on a regular basis. I also was assigned as Archdiocesan Chaplain of the Home-School Association and became a member of the Cana Board.

In 1968, I was appointed to the Office of the Council of Catholic Women as Associate Archdiocesan Moderator and the Catholic Family Consultation Service as Assistant Director.

This appointment gave my life a whole new direction. But I was most fortunate to continue residing at St. Francis of Rome because it offered a continuing base for exercising pastoral ministry.

With the Council of Women, we initiated many new programs -- especially in areas of human relations and adult religious education. The Council of Women was a tremendous catalyst for myself personally and the structure of the organization gave me the opportunity to visit and speak in over 300 parishes of the Archdiocese.

The Catholic Family Consultation Service offered me a deep insight into the experience of marriage counseling and the concern the Church has for couples in such situations.

An auxiliary service offered through our office was the Archdiocesan Health Program which provides physical and psychological services to the priests, nuns, and religious of the diocese. An important element of this program is the alcoholic counseling program for priests and religious.

Beginning in 1968, I started teaching at Niles College. Beginning in 1968 I also served on many committees of the Archdiocese, from religious education to adult education, from the communications planning commission to finally the Senate Design Committee.

The appointment to the Senate Design Committee really changed my life because as Secretary-Treasurer of the Committee, it put me in contact with a vast group of priests in the archdiocese. At the end of 1971, elections for senator were held in the 108 Senatorial Districts of the Archdiocese. I was elected to represent the downtown offices connected with Catholic Charities. On December 14 of 1971, I was elected President of the Presbyteral Senate. This was a full time position and so I took a two year leave of absence from my previous assignment while still maintaining my residence at St. Frances of Rome.

Since December 1971, I have had the unique experience of initiating a new structure in the Archdiocese. It has been a tremendous experience. My term concludes in January 1974. When I accepted the position as rector of St. Mary of the Lake Seminary, I raised the question with the Presbyteral Senate on whether I should continue as president for the remaining 14 weeks of my term. Their response was most affirmative.

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And on September 15, 1973, I became Rector of St. Mary of the Lake Seminary. How did this happen? In May of this year, the Cardinal told me that Monsignor Gorman had expressed the desire and decision to leave the seminary by the beginning of the present school year. The Cardinal asked what did I think of the possibility of assuming this position. To say the least, I was flabbergasted. My initial reaction was that a process of consultation should be initiated. The Cardinal entered into a process of consultation at the end of June with the faculty according to the norms of the NCCB document on Priestly Formation. The next morning, June 29th, the Cardinal called and asked if I would agree to be Rector of St. Mary of the Lake Seminary. My response was positive and the formal announcement was made July 2nd with the effective date of the appointment being September 15.

Why did I assume the position as rector? To be honest, the answer to that question is simple, yet it is also complicated by so many factors.

The first reason I said "yes" was because the Cardinal asked.

The second reason was the challenge involved.

The third reason was a desire to be part of the future. For a seminary really is a strong determinant of the future of the Church and society.

Fourthly, in the experiences which I have had, I had a strong desire to share with others what I myself have learned and what others have taught me.

Finally, I said "yes" because of the encouragement of friends and fellow priests.

How do I see the position of rector? Where do I see the seminary going?

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What is my view of the position as rector? First and foremost, it is a continuation of the direction initiated by Monsignor John Gorman. My view is based on the description of the rector in the NCCB document "The Program of Priestly Formation."

According to this document, it states:

"the rector should be carefully prepared in sound doctrine, suitable pastoral experience and special spiritual and pedagogical training"

I really believe the assignments I have had as a priest have provided me with a base whereby I see myself somewhat fitting this description. At the same time, I am not that naive to assume that I am the complete whole integrated man who has all the answers. Far from it. I see this whole experience at the beginning as a learning and listening process.

The document, however, goes on to say that:

"more than others, the rector influences the direction and tone of the seminary program. Under the rector's leadership, they are to form a very closely knit community both in spirit and in activity and they are to constitute among themselves and with the students that kind of family that will answer to the Lord's prayer, "that they may be one." By creating a climate of mutual confidence and trust, he will elicit the full cooperation and involvement of faculty and students." (P. 220)

The words are clearly delineated of what the task of rector is -- and as I reflect upon them, I realize that any man who could accomplish all the above should be canonized immediately.

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However, I do see the challenge -- a challenge which says somehow or other to all of us -
faculty and students --

- o Be one
- o Be trusting
- o Be confident in what we are about
- o Be demanding in all that we do
- o Be open

This challenge and all that it implies is the tone and direction I envision at St. Mary of the Lake.

Be one -- not in the sense of being the individual so isolated from everyone else and so headstrong on one's own private agenda that the challenge to be one does not bring diverse and individual people together, but rather separates them.

Be trusting -- and perhaps trusting enough to follow the challenge that is all around us without having the challenge go through five committees and become watered down and dilluted in the process. Be trusting enough to eradicate from our vocabulary divisions expressed in words such as "we" and "they" -- or, "us" or "them" -- reminiscent of poised enemies ready to pounce on one another. Be trusting enough to ask of leadership in the community to point the way, to show direction -- and if we err -- as we do -- to admit we were wrong and be trusting enough to begin again.

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Be confident in what we are about -- by really developing a healthy pride in seminary, in this seminary, in St. Mary of the Lake. At times, I really believe we are our own worst enemies. At times, our negativism creates a climate which does fantastic damage to our own psyche and prevents others from really seriously considering priesthood as a vocation.

Be confident by being demanding in all that happens here at St. Mary of the Lake -- academically formationally, spiritually, and in turn, I am confident enough to ask the faculty to be as demanding as possible in academics, formations, the spiritual life.

This challenge to be demanding is rooted in hope, a hope expressed beautifully in the words of Erich Fromm:

"To hope means to be ready at every moment for that which is not yet born....
those whose hope is weak settle down for comfort or violence;
those whose hope is strong see and cherish all signs of new life and are
ready at every moment to help the birth of that which is ready to be born."

Finally, be open --- and this openness is in itself the greatest challenge. It precludes prejudice, it excludes our own pre-set agendas, it includes dreams and visions of a challenge that can be met, that will be achieved.

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The NCCB document further describes the position of rector as the one "ultimately responsible for all aspects of seminary life." In other words, the buck stops here!! And I, in turn, have the position of accountability --

- to the Ordinary
- to the priests of the diocese
- to the entire People of God in the Archdiocese

This accountability which is mine to others must manifest itself in the mutual accountability we have to each other --

- o an accountability which calls for significant presence on all our parts in the seminary program
- o an accountability on all our parts which calls for a mature use of so many dimensions of human existence -- from the use of our time in a productive way to the use of alcohol
- o an accountability for the rights of others with whom we live by a respect for them when we have visitors -- male or female, young or old, from the seminary community or from outside it -- by being conscious of possible disturbance of those who choose to study or to sleep
- o an accountability to the objective norms of expectation in the very life of the seminary -- academics, field education, spiritual formation
- o an accountability for the physical and material dimension of the seminary evidenced in our respect and care for the property, evidenced in stating our intentions in some organized way of presence at meals.

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These are my views from the bridge -- views rooted in two goals of seminary education:

1. We are involved in training men for ministry in service to a total local Church -- whether it is Chicago, Belleville, or Gary. ^{St Wayne} We cannot let ourselves become a trade school where ministry is so narrow that it only embraces one segment of society. We have to be sensitive and willing to the exercise of ministry with the poor, the underprivileged, the neglected, as well as the affluent and the educated.
2. We are involved in training men for pastoral ministry -- with each individual bringing his unique talent to this task.

My views may create tension -- and perhaps they should -- but it must be a healthy, creative tension of dialogue, exchange, flexibility. They must be part of the "open agenda" which I hope will characterize the present year.

In conclusion, I would like to share with you a scroll given to me called Murphy's Law. It goes like this:

"Nothing is as easy as it looks.

Everything takes longer that you expect.

And if anything can go wrong --

it will

At the worst possible moment."